

Award ceremony as an arbiter of commerce and canon in the popular music industry

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Abstract

We show how the Grammy award ceremony played a central role in influencing the US popular music industry through two important inter-organisational processes. The ceremony served as the vehicle through which the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) interlinked with commercial interests in the field: the distributors, wholesalers and retailers who are represented by the National Association of Record Merchandisers (NARM). As music became a more visual medium and television coverage of the ceremony became prominent, merchandisers came to rely on the Grammy awards as their sales cue, and began to aggressively promote nominees and winners. As a result of the retailers' selective attention, Grammy award-winners began enjoying greater popular appeal through increased album sales. Second, attempts made by various constituents of NARAS to influence award decisions resulted in the surfacing of, challenges to and, finally, the resolution of occupational conflicts and normative concerns about the legitimacy of genres in the popular music industry. In the process, NARAS succeeded in championing the Grammy awards as the hallmark of peer recognition. We contend that the unique ability of the Grammy awards to mingle both peer and popular recognition makes them a significant arbiter of canon formation in the popular music industry.

Anyone tracing the creation of the canon of contemporary British and Commonwealth literary fiction would be hard pressed to ignore the influence of the Booker Prize for literature. Authors such as J.M. Coetzee, Salman Rushdie, and Michael Ondaatje would make any list, thanks to the exposure they have received among critics and consumers by winning the prize. Todd (1996) contends the Booker's canon-forming potential is owed to organisational processes that retailers put in motion to cope with the commercial impact that short-listed books may be expected to have. Publishers of literary fiction divide their lists into 'lead' and 'non-lead' lists (Todd 1996, p. 97). Books placed in the former category receive more resources towards promotion and publicity. Publishers invite critics and other opinion leaders to review lead titles and also provide significant incentives for retailers to display these prominently in stores. Such moves increase the likelihood of a title making the Booker shortlist; making the shortlist, in turn, generally commands even more attention from retailers, thereby assuring its large-scale distribution. Inter-organisational arrangements that make popular culture products available to a widespread audience (embracing both critics and fans) are therefore vital to the canon formation process.

In this article we uncover inter-organisational processes in the popular music industry. We look at how the Grammy award, the most prestigious prize in North

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American popular music, is implicated in the canon-formation process. We begin with a brief look at the origins and emerging objectives of the Grammy award. Using a combination of archival, interview, and sales performance data, we illustrate the specific processes through which the awards help construct the canon artists in the field.

NARAS: origins and espoused values

The impetus for the Grammy awards came in 1955 when the Hollywood Beautification Committee, a Los Angeles civic body constituted to improve the image of that city, asked music industry executives to nominate entertainers to be honoured with a tiled 'star' on its proposed 'Walk of Fame'. Executives from the then industry giants Columbia, MGM, Capitol, Decca and RCA record labels held a series of meetings to compile a shortlist of worthy musicians. The group, however, was unable to agree upon any criterion for selecting designees other than the quantum of sales. It was decided that only nominees who had sold more than a million singles or a quarter of a million albums would be eligible for the recognition. Nevertheless, identification of sales as the measure of greatness was an uncomfortable compromise because it excluded critically acclaimed singers such as Ella Fitzgerald, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday.

In response, the executive then heading Columbia Records, Paul Weston, set in motion the process of creating a professional association that was formally inaugurated in 1957 as the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS). Part of the organisation's remit, he felt, would be to provide 'a proper means for rewarding people on an artistic level' (Schipper 1992, p. 2). The new organisation, taking the form of a guild of creative personnel in the industry, was modeled on Hollywood's Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS).

In 1959, NARAS instituted an award scheme similar to the AMPAS Oscar and called it the 'Grammy' (shortened from gramophone). A fundamental rule adopted by NARAS was that only 'creatives' – comprising recording artists, conductors, songwriters and engineers – had the right to constitute committees that would consider nominations for the awards, as well as the right to vote for the winners. Other, more 'humdrum' industry personnel (Caves 2000), such as promoters, publicists and publishers, were deliberately excluded from participating in the awards nomination and voting processes.

The new NARAS organisation embodied one key ideal: the Grammy awards would be based on artistic merit alone. Two inherent values were espoused in the championing of creative achievement: sales would not be the yardstick by which success was measured, and only 'experts' (i.e. NARAS insiders) would decide which genres of music were suitable for inclusion. Those involved in the 'business' of music would not play a role in the Grammy process.

The first espoused value was that the awards must remain free from the taint of commercialism, and therefore volume of sales would not be considered when judging the nominees. This value was so strongly held that it was overtly articulated, as evidenced in the 'Grammy Credo' mailed along with NARAS ballots in early years of Grammy voting:

We shall judge a record on the basis of sheer artistry, and artistry alone. A record shall, in the opinion of the Academy, attain the highest degree of excellence or it shall not receive an award.

Sales and mass popularity are the yardsticks of the record business [but] they are not the yardsticks of this Academy. We are concerned here with the phonograph record as an art form. If the industry is to grow, not decline, in stature; if it is to encourage greater excellence in its own field; if it is to discourage mediocrity and encourage greatness, we as its spokespersons, can accept no other Credo. (Schipper 1992, p. 6)

As this credo reveals, the NARAS organisation was concerned with securing peer evaluation as a key arbiter of worthiness within the music industry. With the awards process independent of consumers and critics, the Grammy was considered by NARAS office-holders to be a pure judgement of artistic excellence since it was not swayed by the winds of commerce. As we shall show, this attempt to control canonical attributions of greatness was, ironically, in later years to influence significantly the commerce of the popular music industry.

A second espoused value of the NARAS organisation was to make pronouncements about the 'correctness' of various categories of music. In the minds of those advancing the NARAS agenda, certain types of music were considered artistically appropriate and worthy of awards while, importantly, other genres were to be shunned. Although record labels were allegedly kept at an arm's length from NARAS, the industry's elite who favoured a jazz-based standard of pop music, performed by the likes of Frank Sinatra, Perry Como and Doris Day, was well represented (Sanjek 1996). The first chairman of NARAS was Jim Conklin, a former associate of Paul Weston at Columbia. The founding board of governors included Weston's wife, the singer Jo Stafford, jazz bandleader Stan Kenton, jazz sax player Benny Carter, and entertainer Nat King Cole.

For the music industry elite of the late 1950s, rock and roll was a taboo genre (Ennis 1992). A significant generational change in the industry, reflected in opposing musical tastes, was clearly emerging. New entrepreneurs, such as Sam Phillips of Sun Records, were championing rock and roll, a genre that proved to be an instant commercial success with the younger generation of consumers. By the end of 1957, rock and roll songs occupied over half the positions on the *Billboard* chart, replacing jazz-inflected pop like that of Frank Sinatra. NARAS founder Paul Weston lamented what he saw as a lowering of musical standards brought about by rock musicians: 'When music got in the hands of American teenagers, quality went down the tubes' (Schipper 1992, p. 2).

The NARAS award committee ignored the rock and roll genre from the very inception of the Grammys in 1958, a year in which nominated recordings included those by, among others, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie, and Henry Mancini. Commercially successful artists of the day, such as Elvis Presley, the Everly Brothers, and Paul Anka, were omitted from the nominations. Bandleader Les Brown, an influential NARAS member in the formative years, recalled that the organisation 'had nothing to do with rock'n'roll. [We were] founded to reward that good stuff – and what we thought was the good stuff – and challenge the crap' (Schipper 1992, p. 2). A list of the Grammy award categories from 1975 (see Table 1) reveals that despite being one of the canonical genres of American music of the twentieth century (alongside jazz and blues), rock and roll was not acknowledged by the NARAS organisation as a genre worthy of merit. Pop, R&B, Jazz, Country, Blues, Instrumental, Musical, Film, and Spoken Word received distinctive awards in that list, but rock and roll had to wait two full decades – until 1979 – to carve an inroad into NARAS.

The ideal of 'artistic merit' embodied the value of the 'rightness' of musical taste. According to Mary Douglas (1986), all institutions, at some level, are implicated in the

Table 1. The Grammy award categories, 1975.

GENRE	AWARD CATEGORY	
'The Top Four'	Album of the year	
	Record of the year	
	Song of the year (songwriter's award)	
	Best new artist	
Pop	Best pop vocal performance, male	
	Best pop vocal performance, female	
	Best pop vocal performance, duo or group	
	Best pop instrumental performance	
R&B	Best R&B song (songwriter's award)	
	Best R&B vocal performance, male	
	Best R&B vocal performance, female	
	Best R&B vocal performance, duo or group	
	Best R&B instrumental performance	
Jazz	Best jazz performance, soloist	
	Best jazz performance, group	
	Best jazz performance, big band	
Country	Best country song (songwriter's award)	
	Best country vocal performance, male	
	Best country vocal performance, female	
	Best country vocal performance, duo or group	
	Best country instrumental performance	
Gospel	Inspirational performance	
	Best gospel performance (not soul)	
	Best soul gospel performance	
Blues	Ethnic or traditional recording	
	Instrumental	Best instrumental arrangement
		Instrumental composition (composer's award)
		Best arrangement with accompanying vocalists
Musical		Best cast show album
Film	Best original score (composer's award)	
Classical	Album of the year, classical	
	Best classical performance, orchestra	
	Best opera recording	
	Best choral performance, not opera	
	Best chamber music performance	
	Best classical performance, instrumental	
	Best classical performance, vocal soloist	
	Best engineered recording, classical	
	Best album notes, classical (annotator's award)	
	Spoken	Best comedy recording
		Best spoken word
Best recording for children		
Craft	Best engineered recording, non-classical	
	Best album package	
	Best album notes (annotator's award)	
	Producer of the year	

act of classifying. NARAS, through its awards scheme, purported to influence the social cognition of legitimate popular music genres. As we shall show, NARAS's view of categorical 'correctness' of genres at any given time was very much predicated by the dynamics of its membership. As a new generation took over the reins of the NARAS organisation, rock and roll shed its 'profane' status, and other, newer genres such as Latin and rap music were also embraced, albeit as a result of conflicts of their own.

Methodology

We have sought to establish how two of NARAS's espoused values – (i) to keep a distance from commercial aspects of the business, and (ii) to dictate the legitimacy of genres constituting the popular music industry – unfolded over time through the enactment of the annual Grammy award ceremonies. We considered three types of data for our analysis: reports from periodicals, interviews with informants, and sales records. Our analysis spans the years from 1975 to 1994. The Grammy awards started coming into prominence by 1975, with the telecast of its annual ceremony garnering viewing ratings of over 50 per cent (O'Neil 1993). Our study period provides us with two decades of observation to assess the impact of the Grammy awards.

Periodicals data

We relied on *Billboard* magazine as our primary source of archival data on the Grammy awards. A weekly trade magazine, *Billboard* is dedicated to coverage of the music industry, and its editorial mission is 'to help our readers do better business' by 'analysing and interpreting the present'. We extracted and coded the full text of lead articles in *Billboard* covering the Grammy awards for the years 1975–1994. Lead articles are those that appear on the front page of the magazine, thereby signalling the importance of the story to the readership. We found seventy-one such articles. We analysed the content of articles using QSR's NVivo® software program, coding at the level of the text-unit. Weber (1990) defines a text-unit as a sentence or sequence of sentences conveying a coherent point. Since we wished to examine the discourse concerning espoused values of NARAS, we used three coding themes: (i) relationship between Grammy awards and record sales [labelled 'Sales']; (ii) discussion about the legitimacy of judgements made by the Grammy awards committee [labelled 'Legitimacy']; and (iii) other themes, the bulk of which contained descriptions of who won or lost awards as well as the happenings that transpired at the ceremony [labelled 'Descriptive']. Illustrations of the coding themes are presented in Table 2. For simplicity of presentation, we present contrasts in data themes between the decades 1975–1984 and 1985–1994.

Interviews

After analysing the periodicals data, we conducted focused interviews with eighteen informants to deepen our understanding and resolve ambiguity in interpretation. Interviewees included NARAS officials, Grammy award winners, executives with major record labels and large national record retailing and distribution firms, and staff of *Billboard* magazine. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and one hour in

Table 2. Content analysis: coding themes with examples.

Theme 1: 'Sales' (the relationship between Grammy awards and sales)

Whitney Houston and Phil Collins are leading the post-Grammy sales pack, according to music retailers. For Houston, whose Arista solo album debut was already selling at a fast clip, national exposure from the awards broadcast created additional momentum. For Collins' multi-award winning 'No Jacket Required', the Grammy broadcast Feb. 25 gave the release new legs. (*Billboard* 1986)

Throughout this decade the Grammy show and to a lesser extent January's American Music Awards have become spark plugs for music sales. Both awards shows have become centrepieces for promotions staged by the National Association of Recording Merchandisers. (*Billboard* 1989)

Retailers confirm that some country artists experienced a slight gain after the Grammys. At Best Buy, [Kathy] Mattea's catalogue sales jumped last week, particularly 'Untasted Honey'. Also seeing some action at the chain were the Kentucky Headhunters and the Texas Tornados, both Grammy winners. (*Billboard* 1991)

Roy Burkert, buyer for the 35-unit Harmony House chain in Troy, Mich., says, 'Eric Clapton was unbelievable [for us]. We had five to six times the sales of the pre-Grammy numbers'. Similarly, Lou Fogelman says Clapton's sales almost quadrupled from the previous week and is by far the chain's top seller. 'It's a major increase even for Grammy week'. (*Billboard* 1993)

Theme 2: 'Legitimacy' (of Grammy category, nominations and awards)

With few really glaring omissions, the Grammy finalists this year pretty well represent the most artistically impressive mainstream commercial records of the year. As usual, the tastes of the 4,000 voting Record Academy members run toward the softer and prettier sounds available. (*Billboard* 1976)

Reaction from Latin labels across the country to this year's Latin Grammy nominations, the second in the history of the awards, ranges from profound indifference to fuming indignation . . . Specifically the accusation is that salsa music, only a small segment of the total Latin music scene in the US, dominates the competition and that Fania Records, the dominant salsa label, gets an immensely disproportionate share of the action. A look at this year's pre-nominations list (from which the final nominees are selected) seems to lend credence to the charge. Of the 63 albums on the list submitted by a total of eight labels, 34 are Fania entries. (*Billboard* 1977)

Trans World [music chain's buyer] Roy and Strawberries [music chain's buyer] Cohen both fear the Grammys could lose an edge to the American Music Awards if this year's pattern of odd nominations and winners continues. Both cite the awarding of the hard rock/metal trophy to Jethro Tull over the currently popular Guns N Roses and Def Leppard as a decision that particularly miffed consumers. We were asking ourselves do the kids who like Guns N Roses even know who Iggy Pop is says Cohen, referring to one of the nominees. This year's Grammys left a sour taste says Roy. There was so much comment about who was nominated and who was not. (*Billboard* 1989)

The lack of a performance or on-air presentation of an award to a nominee in the rap-group category during the Grammy broadcast . . . prompted one of those nominees, Public Enemy, to boycott the show. (*Billboard* 1991)

Nine Inch Nails' win in the best-metal performance category may have turned some heads, since the band is generally considered to be alternative or industrial, a genre NARAS does not yet recognise. (*Billboard* 1993)

Theme 3: 'Description' (of Grammy nominees, winners, and awards show)

The versatile Stevie Wonder emerges as the act with the most nominations: seven for a 1975 Grammy. In announcing scores of nominations, the NARAS discloses that members have honoured Wonder with three nominations as a performer, two as a songwriter and two as a producer. Wonder captured five Grammys last year. (*Billboard* 1975)

The ceremonies, emanating from New York's famed Radio City Music Hall maintained a degree of elegance and were overall less gimmicky and hokey, problems that marred last year's production. The presenter pairings were well matched. The pairing of Herb Alpert and Harry Belafonte, two veterans for the presentation of best new artist, was especially tailor made. (*Billboard* 1981)

Table 2. Continued.

Michael Jackson set a new record for most Grammys won in a single year when he took home eight key awards at the 26th annual Grammy ceremonies. The previous record of six awards was set by Roger Miller in 1965. Jackson's eight Grammys were twice as many as the four received by his nearest runners-up – his producer Quincy Jones, Sting of the Police and Sir Georg Solti, music director of the Chicago Symphony. (*Billboard* 1984)

The Academy has also announced the five inductees into the Hall of Fame, which is designed to honour recordings of lasting qualitative or historical significance released prior to the advent of the Grammy Awards. This year's honourees 'A-Tisket-A-Tasket' by Chick Webb and His Orchestra, featuring Ella Fitzgerald (1938 Decca), 'Bach: Goldberg Variations for Harpsichord' by Wanda Landowska (1945 Victor), 'Blue Suede Shoes' by Carl Perkins (1956 Sun), 'Cool Water' by the Sons of the Pioneers (1941 Decca) and 'Tea for Two' by Art Tatum (1939 Decca). (*Billboard* 1986)

The televised portion of the Shrine Auditorium ceremony got off to a rousing start with Peter Gabriel's visually stunning rendition of Steam. Gabriel flanked by a pair of Marilyn Monroe look-alikes miming sax, sported purple velvet flares, platform shoes and a fake physique that made him look like a pumped up Rambo. While he performed members of the Cirque du Soleil troupe provided acrobatic high jinx. (*Billboard* 1993)

duration. Since some informants requested anonymity, informants are identified only by title in the article.

Sales data

Both the periodicals and interview data indicated that, along with improved prestige, the most visible commercial impact of winning a Grammy award is improved record sales. We tested the sales impact of winning a Grammy in order to confirm this insight. We based our test on sales of records by new and emerging artists during our sample period since well-established artists might have created their reputation in other ways prior to winning a Grammy award. 'Best New Artist' is a category explicitly honouring artists who are not yet established. To illustrate, the nominees for 1986 comprised Bruce Hornsby and the Range (winner), Glass Tiger, Nu Shooz, Simply Red, and Timbuk3. In contrast, the nominees for 'Best Album' tend to be established artists; in the same year these included winner Paul Simon, Barbara Streisand, Janet Jackson, Peter Gabriel, and Steve Winwood. To check for the effect of winning a Grammy award early in one's career, we collected sales data for all subsequent releases by those nominated to the category between 1970 and 1994. We used the Recording Industry Association of America's (RIAA) data on certified sales as of November 2002. RIAA's data validate the gold (sales of 500,000 units) and platinum (sales of 1 million units) status of records and are generally acknowledged to be the best verified measure of sales performance in the industry.

Findings

Our data reveal three significant ways in which the Grammy awards shape the canon formation process in the popular music field. We found an emerging influence of the awards on *subsequent* sales of records by Grammy winners. Second, we note that the enactment of awards constantly brings into question the legitimacy of categorical

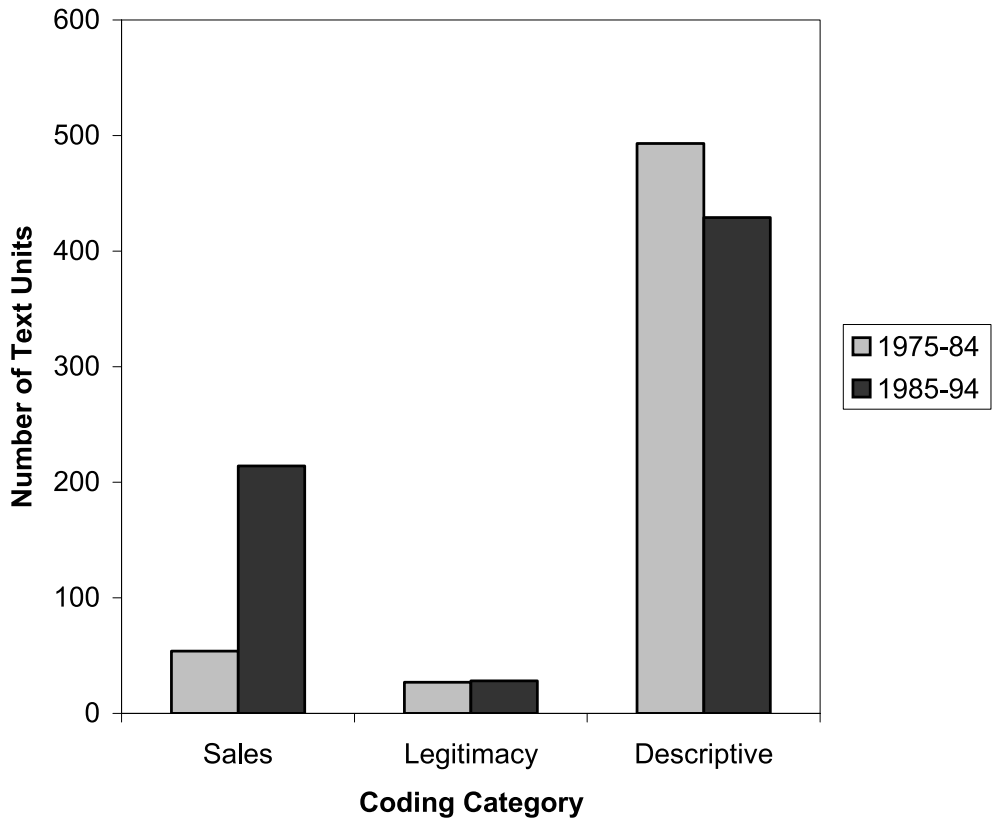


Figure 1. Comparison of Billboard themes across decades.

judgements of worthiness made by the NARAS awards committee and its voters. Finally, evidence suggests that the award ceremony plays a critical role in constructing prestige within the field. These findings are elaborated in the remainder of this section.

Emerging influence of a Grammy award on subsequent sales

The founding members of NARAS were concerned about the sales records of artists somehow 'tainting' the purity of the Grammy awards. By and large, the discourse in *Billboard* shows that such fears remained unfounded. No doubt to the dismay of the NARAS founders, the direction of influence went the other way: being nominated for, or winning, a Grammy award helped increase subsequent record sales. In the first decade of our study (1975–1984) period, there is little reported in *Billboard* on the relationship between record sales and the awards (see Figure 1).

During the early years of our study period, speculation about a relationship between Grammys and sales began, but assessments of the effect were mixed. In 1976, *Billboard* carried a report asserting that a Grammy award could help improve record sales. In the issue dated 13 March of that year, *Billboard* quoted Bob Reid, then vice president of sales at the label A&M, saying: 'Winning a Grammy is definitely worth plenty in sales, even in something as simple as guaranteed good exposure positioning in retail stores'. A merchandising manager for A&M was quoted saying: 'Any

recognition factor like a Grammy award helps you subconsciously with the dealers . . . They figure that there must be more sales in it for them if they can come up with the right merchandising key at their outlets'. However, other retailers in that report seemed sceptical about the Grammy's influence on sales. For example, a spokesman for the National Record Mart chain was noted remarking: 'the Grammy designation has not made too much difference on the sales of the records involved'. In all, 54 *Billboard* text units make a reference to the theme of sales.

Interestingly, what remained mere speculation for the first decade became full-blown conviction in the second. As can be seen from Figure 1, discourse about sales quadrupled (to 214 text units) in *Billboard's* reporting on the Grammy awards in 1985–1994. Ever the retailer's friend, the magazine prominently featured stories on music chart success enjoyed by artists who had been successful on awards night with stories like the three illustrated below:

This week's *Billboard* charts amply show the sales might of the Grammys. In addition to bulleted gains by Paul Simon, Steve Winwood, and Anita Baker, several other featured or winning artists improved their showings on the Top Pop Albums chart. Blues artist Robert Cray enjoyed a strong post-awards showing. . . . Whitney Houston who performed twice in the broadcast moved from No. 43 to a bulleted No. 30. New artist Grammy winners Bruce Hornsby and the Range held at No. 3 with a bullet. A performance by Janet Jackson helped the singer pick up a bullet as she retained the No. 5 position . . . Other Grammy winners or performers picking up ground on the Top Pop Albums chart include Robert Palmer, the Judds, David Sanborn, Bob James, Andres Vollenwelder, Dwight Yokam, Randy Travis and Simply Red. (*Billboard*, 14 March 1987)

Quincy Jones' 'Back On The Block' is back on the chart and Mariah Carey, already sitting pretty at No. 1 on the Top Pop Albums chart, is getting stronger in the wake of victories by both artists Feb 20 at the 33rd annual Grammy awards. (*Billboard*, 9 March 1991)

Beneficiaries of Grammy goodwill included Sting, Billy Joel, Kenny G, Gloria Estefan, and Aretha Franklin – all of whom performed on the live TV presentation from New York's Radio City Music Hall on March 1. Sting garnered only one award, best pop vocal performance by a male for 'If I Ever Lose My Faith In You', but that honour . . . helped double sales of his album, *Ten Summoner's Tales*, (16,000 to 32,000) and push it up to No. 34 on this week's chart from 62 last week. Other album movers: Billy Joel's *River Of Dreams* (25,000 to 40,000 units, No. 38 to 27 on the chart); Kenny G's *Breathless* (27,000 to 33,000, No. 34 to 32) . . . Although he was not asked to sing during the show, Grammy Legend Award honouree Frank Sinatra did perform at retail: *Duets* rose 17% (23,000 to 27,000 units). (*Billboard*, 19 March 1994)

Interviews with our industry informants revealed that the transmutation of cultural capital accorded by the Grammy awards into commercial capital – starkly absent in the first decade of our observation – did not come about through happenstance. It occurred after 1984 thanks to purposeful and concerted efforts of NARAS and another powerful professional association, the National Association of Record Merchandisers (NARM), an umbrella group representing music distributors, wholesalers and retailers.

In the words of one wholesale purchaser, among retailers the 'idea of using the Grammy awards as a promotional vehicle germinated in 1983'. In that year, NARM formalised an agreement with NARAS whereby record labels provided stickers, posters and other point-of-purchase material emblazoned 'Grammy Nominee' or 'Grammy Award Winner' that retailers could use in order to improve marketing efforts (*Billboard*, 22 January 1983). Our purchaser informant remarked that the timing of the awards – late February – provided an opportunity to promote records in the stores after the sales peak of the Christmas and New Year period.

Table 3. Career sales performance of 'Best New Artist' winners and nominees 1970–1994 (means, standard deviations in parentheses).

	All	Winners	Nominees	Winners versus nominees F (1, 124)
Certified sales (million units)	6.36 (11.77)	10.91 (11.48)	5.40 (11.55)	4.08 (p<0.046)
Certified albums	3.63 (4.40)	5.09 (3.32)	3.31 (4.56)	3.00 (p<0.086)
Sales longevity	3902.66 (3528.87)	5002.05 (3596.22)	3547.48 (3468.90)	2.75 (p<0.101)
N	126	22	104	

Another informant, currently an executive office-holder at NARM, remarked that by the mid-1980s the advent of the MTV channel had expanded music into a *visual* medium, too. In addition, it was 'the fact that they could see the show in prime time, performing live [on the network broadcast of the Grammy awards programme], increased the importance – the immediacy of wanting to go out and buy the stuff. Even those who didn't watch MTV went out and bought Grammy records'. When consumers entered record shops, they were confronted with promotional material that drew attention to Grammy nominees and winners that in turn seemed to influence their buying behaviour. This marketing mechanism worked so well that, another retail informant told us: 'you want to sit back with 20/20 hindsight and go, "Duh! Why didn't we think of this sooner" '.

Sales Analysis

Did *Billboard's* rhetoric and NARM's marketing strategy result in improved sales for Grammy winners? To answer this question, as in a related study, we compared the career performance of winners and nominees in the Best New Artist category between 1970 and 1994 as reported in the RIAA database in November 2002 (Anand and Watson 2004). We chose 1970 because that was about the time the Grammys began to be taken seriously within the music industry, especially since the Academy was mooting the centralisation of the award ceremony into one night covering all categories instead of the regional banquets that had been the norm. We chose 1994 as the closing year because it provides sufficient time for the average New Artist's career – just over ten years – to play out.

We compared winners and nominees on the following: sales certified by RIAA, measured in terms of millions of units; the number of albums that were certified 'gold' or 'platinum' by RIAA; and the number of days their certified albums continued to sell – regardless of whether the performers continued to be active in their recording careers. The data are reported in Table 3.

The data show that best new artists, on average, sell 6.26 million albums. When we explore these figures by Grammy outcomes, we find that winners – with sales of 10.91 million units – outperform nominees, who average sales of 5.4 million units (see the row marked 'Certified Sales' in Table 3). The F-test indicates that there is a less than 5 per cent chance that this difference could be attributed to chance, so we can be confident that 'Best New Artist' Grammy winners do outsell nominees. Winners go

on to produce 5.09 albums on average, while nominees record only 3.31; this difference is only of marginal statistical significance. There is no statistically significant difference in terms of the sales longevity of albums released by winners versus nominees.

Quantitative sales data show that winners of the 'Best New Artist' category sell more albums than nominees but cannot address why these differences occur. We therefore sought out other data sources, in the form of *Billboard* reports and industry interviews, to elucidate the key factors in operation. These data show that this sales difference can be attributed to very specific organisational processes that link the two professional associations NARAS and NARM and contribute to improved sales of Grammy winners. Any canon of popular music, to some extent, has to be sensitive to the sales performance of an artist, which is an unambiguous measure of popularity.

Categorical judgements and institutional legitimacy

Another major finding from our data is the lively dialectical relationship between NARAS and its constituents. One of the themes uncovered in our content analysis of *Billboard* text data is the legitimacy of decisions made by NARAS with respect to categories and the winners. Fifty-five text units address this debate, continuing at a stable rate over time (in 1975–1984, 18 units; in 1985–1994, 27 units).

The illegitimacy of an award handed out inappropriately or in an ill-thought manner has always been vocally protested. For example, when the inaugural award for 'Best Country and Western Performance' was given to the folk group the Kingston Trio for the traditional song 'Tom Dooley', a huge outcry from members of NARAS's Nashville chapter comprising the country and western music community ensured that such errors were avoided in judging the best of that genre. Likewise, in 1992, *Rolling Stone* magazine characterised a NARAS decision to award the 'Best Rap Performance By a Duo or Group' to D.J. Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince instead of Public Enemy as 'seemingly drug induced'.

However, of far greater consequence to the field were judgements made by NARAS about whether or not to create award categories for specific genres of popular music. It is through its role as an institution that makes classifications far-reaching (Douglas 1986) that NARAS can hope to uphold its claims to the canon-formation process within the popular music industry. In this regard, the politics governing the inclusion of rock, Latin and rap genres into the awards categories show that NARAS increasingly struggled in its ability to hold back new genres in the face of changes in the music industry.

Rock music award category

As we have noted earlier, the founding of NARAS was, to some extent, motivated by what was perceived to be the crass commercial success of genres like rock and roll. As a result, the Academy had a somewhat ambivalent relationship with proponents of the rock genre in the early years. The inaugural ceremony did not have any awards for this genre despite its huge popular success. What turned out to be canonical songs of the rock genre that might have been eligible for an award – Chuck Berry's 'Johnny B. Goode', Little Richard's 'Good Golly Miss Molly', and Ritchie Valens's 'La Bamba' – were snubbed. Eventually, an award housed in the 'Pop' category entitled 'Best Rock & Roll Recording' was instituted in 1961, with Chubby Checker winning for 'Let's

Twist Again'. In 1965, the number of awards in the pop genre was increased to four to include 'Best Vocal Performance' by male, female, and group and 'Best Single', but the category itself was labelled 'Contemporary (R&R)' instead of rock and roll. Even then, in that category, quintessential rock artists such as the Beatles were voted out in favour of country and western acts Roger Miller (Best Single and Best Male Performance for 'King of the Road') and the Statler Brothers (Best Group for 'Flowers on the Wall'). For the 1967 version of the awards the parenthetical ('R&R') in the category's label was removed leaving the category simply 'Contemporary' – the mention of 'Rock' or 'Rock and Roll' seemed taboo.

The list of award categories for 1975 shown in Table 1 is revealing. Although the rock and roll revolution had waxed and waned in the field of popular music, there was still no room for the genre in NARAS's official scheme of things. While pop, R&B, blues, country, and classical genres were accorded multiple awards by this time, there was still no inclusion of rock and roll. A *Rolling Stone* report from 1976 lists prominent rock musicians who had not won a Grammy award until then: the Allman Brothers Band, Joan Baez, the Band, the Beach Boys, Chuck Berry, David Bowie, the Byrds, Jackson Browne, Eric Clapton, Sam Cooke, Bob Dylan, Marvin Gaye, Elton John, Led Zeppelin, Leiber & Stoller, Van Morrison, Randy Newman, Richard Perry, Phil Spector, Smokey Robinson, the Rolling Stones, Diana Ross, Rod Stewart, the Who and Yes.

The industry elite that constituted NARAS in the late 1950s and early 1960s continued to deny rock music its due within the Academy despite the genre's overwhelming commercial appeal and its obvious artistic impact. The dominant view seems to have been, in the words of Nehushi Eretegun (co-founder of the jazz-influenced Atlantic Records) that rock was a 'passing fad' (Schipper 1992, p. 6). This attitude changed only when a new generation of executives and artists took over at the helm of the industry; their control of the field was proclaimed in NARAS's decision in 1979 to create a separate genre for rock music with three awards: 'Best Vocal Performance, Solo', 'Best Rock Performance, Duo or Group With Vocal', and 'Best Rock Instrumental Performance'. For the new elite, if NARAS was to be taken seriously as a canonical authority, it was important that institutional errors of the past be rectified. For some of its constituents, however, NARAS remained a questionable arbiter of prestige as a consequence of its handling of the rock genre. When Mick Jagger, who had not won a Grammy during the influential years of the Rolling Stones, was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award in 1986, he accepted with a backhanded compliment implying that the joke was on NARAS for failing to recognise the worth of rock music (O'Neil 1993, p. 414).

Rap music award category

Similar to the resistance to inclusion experienced by rock and roll artists, rap musicians were initially actively excluded from the musical canon. As discussed earlier, rock espoused values contrary to those held by the NARAS elite. Yet rap provided an even bigger threat through its controversial lyrics and themes of violence and political upheaval. Although rap had achieved enormous commercial success as a popular genre by the early 1980s, rap artists were restricted to being nominated in the R&B category until the first rap award was created, under intense pressure, in 1989. Although the wait for rap inclusion as a category was shorter than the wait for rock and roll, the fight was arguably more bitter. The very first year that the rap category

was included, rap artists were prohibited from even performing on the Grammy telecast.

Rap artists, not satisfied with a single award and intimating (and sometimes directly asserting) that the white majority NARAS officials held a racial bias, threatened to create their own awards show. Given that NARAS continued to face an ever-increasing array of music awards competitors – the Country Music Awards were created in 1964, the Academy of Music Awards were created by Dick Clark in 1973, and the MTV Music Video Awards launched in 1984 – there was an attempt to appease rap artists by removing the live performance ban.

Despite continuing commercial success over the next decade, rap had mixed success within NARAS. By the year 2003, the rap genre had six award categories, whereas rock and roll had eight awards despite peaking as a commercial musical genre nearly two decades earlier. Yet rap continues to exert its popularity by commandeering mainstream categories: in 2003, three of the five nominated as 'Best New Artist' were rap or hip-hop performers.

Latin music award category

The case of Latin music offers an example of how faulty canonical judgements made by NARAS are eventually rectified to reflect the *realpolitik* of the field. In 1975, after lobbying efforts by Latin music executives in New York City, NARAS decided to include a category for Latin music. Two years later, reaction from Latin labels to Latin Grammy nominations continued to be indifferent and apathetic (Gurza 1977). Executives in the Latin genre were indignant that one label, Fania Records, which had lobbied the hardest for the creation of a Latin Grammy, exercised disproportionate influence over that category. The Fania label produced the variant of Latin music known as 'salsa' music; of the sixty-three albums submitted by eight Latin labels in 1977, thirty-four were Fania entries, and four of the final five nominees up for the award were on the Fania label. The skew appeared to be a result of the fact that of the four persons on the committee appointed by NARAS to oversee Latin Grammy submissions, three were connected to Fania Records, and the fourth was a salsa music critic. Executives from rival labels (such as Rico Records, Caytronics, and Musart-Peerless) complained that Latin music was too diverse to be squeezed into a single award, and were dismayed that salsa music was being projected by NARAS as the definitive Latin music genre. Continued lobbying by the rival labels in the following years led NARAS to expand the Latin category and provide three awards for the genre in 1993, so as to be 'properly' representative. The awards were: 'Best Latin Pop Performance', 'Best Tropical Latin Performance', and 'Best Mexican American Performance'.

Indeed, foreseeing the expansion of the audience for Latin music and wishing to avoid the threats of potential separation experienced with Rap artists, in 1997 NARAS launched a separate academy devoted exclusively to the Latin genre. A global organisation by design (members represent thirty nations), the criteria for eligibility are that the recording is distributed in a Latin country or North America, and that 51 per cent of the content is in Spanish or Portuguese. The first Latin Grammys were awarded in 2000. Desiring control over the genre and influence on its canon, the Latin Academy created an independent board in 2003 but still remains a subsidiary group of NARAS. The organisation grants forty-seven awards annually, nearly half as many as the US domestic Grammy Awards.

Table 4. Genres in the expansion of Grammy categories, 1958–2003.^a

Genre	1958 ^b	1963	1973	1983	1993	2003
Classical	6	10	8	9	9	11
Craft	5	10	9	11	8	11
R&B, Blues	1	1	5	6	6	10
Pop/Traditional pop	5	6	4	3	5	8
Rock & Roll	0	0	0	4	6	8
Country	1	1	5	5	7	8
Gospel	0	1	3	7	5	6
Jazz	2	3	3	7	5	6
Latin	0	0	0	3	3	6
Rap	0	0	0	0	2	6
Video/Film/TV	0	0	0	2	2	5
The Top Four (various genres)	3	4	4	4	4	4
Folk	0	1	1	1	2	3
Miscellaneous others	5	4	5	5	10	13
Total additions	28	41	47	67	74	105

^aExcludes the forty-four Latin Grammys awarded since 2000.

^bFounding year.

Summary

The sidelining and subsequent inclusion of rock, Latin and rap music shows how, on the one hand, powerful organisations within the music industry try to stamp their authority on the canon based on an elite taste. On the other hand, when an institution fails to make correct or appropriate classifications, the very legitimacy of the institution is at stake. The relationship between institution and canon is reflexive: while a canon is legitimised by judgements made by institutions, the accuracy of canonical judgements often decides the continuing legitimacy of institutions. In Table 4, we have traced how, over the years, various genres have made their mark on the categories defined by NARAS. Between 1958 and 2003, the number of categories increased from 28 to 105. While categories remained fairly steady over the 1963–1973 decade, after that period, as we have shown with the cases of rock, Latin and rap music, challenges to NARAS's authority over the definition of 'proper' genres became more pronounced. The organisation responded by rapidly incorporating more categories, with thirty-one added in the decade 1993–2003.

A celebration of heroes

In view of the doubts raised about the legitimacy of NARAS in the previous section, it is important to underscore the fact that the Grammy awards are indeed high honour in the popular music field. In our analysis of the *Billboard* discourse we find the majority of text units describing the award ceremony (the 'descriptive' category comprises 493 out of a total of 574 in the first decade, and 429 out of 671 in the second decade) refer directly or indirectly to the fact that winning an award translates into respect and reputation within the field. The Grammy award, with its espoused value of artistic merit, is a form of symbolic capital because it simultaneously proclaims

disinterest in commerce while enabling commercial exploitation that comes from improved artistic reputation (Bourdieu 1993). Consider these examples:

Maintaining his leading status of previous years, Stevie Wonder swept the 19th annual Grammy Award nominations with his *Songs In The Key Of Life* on Tamla last week. Wonder placed in seven separate categories including album of the year and producer of the year. (*Billboard*, 22 January 1977)

Michael Jackson set a new record for most Grammys won in a single year when he took home eight key awards at the 26th annual Grammy ceremonies . . . Jackson's sweep is especially dramatic considering that until that year he had won only one Grammy, for best male R&B performance of 1979 for 'Don't Stop Till You Get Enough'. The Jackson Five have never won a Grammy, nor have the Jacksons. (*Billboard*, 10 March 1984)

Bonnie Raitt's victory is considered one of the biggest upsets in Grammy history. The album *Nick of Time* peaked at No. 22 on the pop album chart, lower than any previous winner in that category. The album rebounds to No. 40 this week – after falling to 119 in December – and is expected to surpass its original peak in the wake of the Grammy sweep. Like Tina Turner's three-Grammy victory five years ago, Raitt's sweep was seen as a celebration of a previously unheralded pop music survivor . . . Raitt's Grammy sweep was complete. She also won for best female pop and rock vocal and best traditional blues recording. (*Billboard*, 3 March 1990)

These extracts from *Billboard* illustrate the various ways in which the Grammy awards mould the reputation of winners. Stevie Wonder is an example of an established and celebrated artist consolidating his status by winning Grammy awards. Michael Jackson built his towering reputation as an entertainer by winning eight awards in 1984. Bonnie Raitt's artistic comeback with the release of her *Nick of Time* album was validated through her Grammy victory; although her album had an initial lukewarm reception, the awards helped her boost sales subsequently and enhance her reputation. The symbolic aspect of the awards night ceremony is essential to validate the prestige and peer approval that is bestowed upon the winners – in Goode's (1978) words, the ceremony is about the 'celebration of heroes' within the field.

The symbolic capital inherent in the prestige of winning a Grammy flows from the individual recipient to organisations with which they are associated. One winner told us that bagging a Grammy is significant 'because it's the only major award voted for by your peers – you can walk down the street with the thrill of knowing that you are considered worthy by other creative people in the business'. A record label executive told us that housing Grammy winners is an important signal in attracting talent: 'People – potential artists, producers and the like – walking into the label think, "this is cool, they have Grammy award winners here" '.

Another informant, familiar with the classical music section of NARAS, revealed that a Grammy serves as a form of capital that can be exploited in that field despite the presence of more prestigious awards:

For Grammy winners, contracts for future recording projects are easier to obtain, as CD sales do increase for a CD that won the Grammy and for new CDs by people who won a Grammy for a previous CD; the Corigliano Symphony No. 1 [by composer John Corigliano] comes to mind as an example.

A symphony orchestra may be more likely to engage a Grammy-winning violinist as a concerto soloist the following season, or to programme a Grammy-winning contemporary composition. The reason for this is not so much because the award itself indicates superior quality, but because the award can be used in publicity to . . . legitimize a classical performer or composer the general public may not know, by associating that person with a benchmark [the Grammy] with which the public is familiar.

In this way, classical music 'borrows' a benchmark of quality from the pop music world, even though the award itself does not carry much weight within the classical profession, compared to its own quality indicators like the Tchaikovsky Competition or Pulitzer Prize for Music . . . The Grammy is an indication, not so much of quality, since classical musicians tend to trust their own ears, but of sales viability. In some cases sales viability can connote a stigma of gimmicky or crass commercialism, for example, as in the case of Russell Watson (*The Voice*) or crossover albums by Yo Yo Ma performing bluegrass music.

Conclusion

We argue that the availability and acceptance of cultural products are critical to canon formation. The televised Grammy award ceremony served as a bridge between NARAS and NARM, and this, in turn, led to the selective exposure of winners and nominees to an audience that was becoming increasingly swayed by visual media such as MTV, The Nashville Network (TNN) and other broadcast and cable channels. For an award that is purely judged by peers, the Grammy has had tremendous influence on popular choice. The commercial success of the Grammys subsequently led constituents within NARAS to lobby for changes in the award categories, leading to an ever-increasing number of genres being recognised as merit worthy. As a consequence of its unique ability to combine both peer and popular appeal, we contend the Grammy award is central to an understanding of the popular music canon.

A canon is conventionally understood as a body of work that stands up to a standard of judgement. Conventional understanding, therefore, would imply an aesthetic evaluation applied to popular music works by consumers, critics or producers. In this article we have taken a 'production of culture' approach (Peterson and Anand 2004) to understanding how a canon is constituted in the popular music field. In doing so, instead of focusing on evaluative aspects of popular music – such as the quality of the melody or profoundness of the lyric – we have emphasised organisational processes that impact on artistic careers and consumer markets. We suggest, therefore, that such organisational processes making available certain works and not others, shade, if not constrain, choices that result in canon formation.

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